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We Used to Be Brothers: Partition 1947

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We Used to Be Brothers:
Partition 1947

*A shallow rivulet is further narrowed by bondage,
and life in freedom is like a limitless ocean*

- *Muhammad Iqbal, Pakistan's National Poet*

Introduction

Following World War II, Britain's withdrawal from India was fast becoming a certainty. The two main Indian political actors were the Indian National Congress, which demanded a secular, united India, and the *Muslim League*, which demanded a separate homeland for Indian Muslims.

On the 14th of August 1947, at 11:57 PM, Pakistan was born. Only five minutes later, at 12:02 AM, India came into being. Much like the timing of their births, very little separates these two nations: culture, language, religion, distance. Today, a short drive from one of Punjab's main cities, Lahore, lies the Wagha Border. One can simply walk across the border, from Lahore, Pakistan, into Amritsar, India – and the whole journey may take less than an hour. The same journey took days and even months for the *Muhajirs*.¹ Sikh and Hindu gangs lay awaiting their passing. Whole trains were burned. Thousands of bodies tossed in rivers. Men were killed and women taken as captives. The Muhajirs, therefore, were faced with the choice of either risking their lives by making the perilous journey across the border or remaining and facing certain death.

Five of my interviewees are Muhajirs and all of them are residents of Punjab, Pakistan. Official Partition borders as demarcated by the outgoing British in 1947 cut right through Punjab – nearly half would go to either nation. It formed a much of the border, and would become the axis of the immigration to follow. Consequently, its soil was drenched with the most blood.

The killing has been described as a holocaust; estimates of the death-toll range from between one and two million. The immigration was the largest in human history, with around 2.5 million Hindus leaving Pakistani land for India, and around 2.5 Muslims going the other way (White-Spinner).

¹ Immigrants—the word traditionally used for the Indians who emigrated to Pakistan.

My interviewees are all strong, Punjabi Pakistanis. They are all Muslims. Their strength regularly humbled me, and it was an honor to speak to them.

Here are their stories:

There were very good Hindus also. They used to say, “We are one, we are of the same country.”

Nuzhat Latif – 82

I was very young at the time – we lived in Calcutta and my father worked for the railways. I studied in a school called *Loreto Convent*.² I think I was in nursery, or something. I remember well that the Christians in the morning did their prayers before class. I knew that wasn’t our prayer! When I went home—I got along better with my father rather than my mother—I asked my father, “Dad, they pray in English - their own prayer?” and he said, “Yes, that’s from the Bible.” I asked, “Should I pray our prayer instead?” And he said, “Of course! You pray in your heart, right?” So I used to pray “*Rabana aatina fidunya*.”³

I was very playful! I was always playing. I studied very little. My mom used to say, “this girl isn’t going to study!” Whether big or small, I used to beat them up! All the big ones were afraid of me. Because I studied in the convent, the Muslims were the minority. There were mostly Christians there. I knew little English. I used to say things like “What! Not!” and mix it up with a bit of *Urdu* and *Punjabi*.⁴ The sisters there understood me and used to laugh. They used to tell my dad, “she’s not afraid of anything, she just goes on blabbering.”

I knew this Sikh, and my dad had told me lots of Sikh stories [*laughing*]. He once came to me once while I was lying down, he said, “Rani”—Rani was my pet name— “is the moon out

² The historic school still exists in India: <http://www.loretoentally.org>

³ An Islamic prayer which translates “Our Lord, grant us (good) in this world”. The full prayer is “Our Lord, grant us good in this world, and good in the hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire” 2:201 Quran.

⁴ The language of Punjab.

or the sun?” I asked him, “you’re Sikh, right? It’s your *Twelve O Clock!*⁵” He went home and asked his dad what that meant, who then complained to my father! I was a very tough girl!

We were mostly with the Sikhs. We were part of their colony; the Hindus had their own. We had great relationships with the Sikhs! They were class-fellows with my dad – they were educated in Lahore from *Forman Christian College*.⁶ My dad had many Sikh friends. They used to say to my dad, “Tell our *bhabhi* [our sister in law] to cook us some fish! Cook us some meat!” The Hindu and Sikh women would never let in meat into their homes! Mom used to cook for them, and they loved to come over to eat.

*Did you eat together with Hindus and Sikhs?*⁷

No, no! Mom had told me not to eat with the Hindus and Sikhs because they didn’t eat Halal.⁸ It’s not good. I didn’t eat with them. I never even had water from their homes. They came! They ate at our homes! They used to say, “Rani, your food is delicious.” My parents had otherwise strictly forbidden me and said, “You will not eat from Hindu families or Sikh families.” They said it wasn’t Halal. I didn’t know what Halal and Haram⁹ was at the time, but they had forbidden me.

We got along with the Sikhs, but we were not very friendly with the Hindus; we got along very little with them. Some Hindus, the good ones, they would come, see us, my mother, and talk to us. There was plenty of mixing. There were some very good Hindus too—I won’t say that they were *all bad*. They used to say, “We are one, we are of the same country.” They were not in favor of Partition. They used to say you have divided our country, you’ve destroyed it. That’s why they killed Muslims. The Sikhs weren’t involved. They became friendly. But they also killed a lot of Muslims. There’s a lot of literature on it, like *Manto*¹⁰. If you read it, you’d be

⁵ The Punjabi phrase translated here is “*bara bajay*,” which literally translates to “12 O Clock,” but metaphorically means to be out of one’s senses.

⁶ This historic college also still exists and has educated generations of Pakistanis (including my own father): <http://www.fccollege.edu.pk>.

⁷ A sensitive topic for South Asian faith communities, who often saw the other faith as spiritually and physically impure, and therefore were often reluctant to eat with each other.

⁸ Islamically Permissible (applied here to food)—like Kosher is for Judaism.

⁹ Islamically Forbidden.

¹⁰ A famous South Asian poet.

frightened. If you read it, you'd understand. They are not to be talked about, they are so frightening. Someone gets hands cut off, some girl is raped by six, seven men—things like these. But the Muslims did them too! The Muslims did a lot of killing in Pindi.¹¹ All the Hindus ran away. They had so much land there, huge properties. All of Model Town¹² was theirs. They had constructed it themselves. They were very rich, and the Muslims very poor. Even after Partition my dad kept his friendships with the Sikhs. We remained in Calcutta even after Partition. We couldn't move to West Pakistan because of all the killing. They were burning full trains.

This is a long story, son.

I was young, but I remember everything going on in the train stations. The railway people told my father that you can't go to West Pakistan, you can't cross the border. There were no planes at the time. We were told to opt for East Pakistan.

My dad was a big officer, and he got a Saloon, which had a kitchen, servant quarter, big seats. It was VIP. It was attached to the middle of the train.

We had relatives in East Pakistan because for many Muslims, it was easier to cross into there rather than make it to West Pakistan. Going to West Pakistan was too hard. They used to cut across the trains, the Sikhs, they never let them go, they killed everyone. I never saw anyone get killed, I was too young. While on the train my dad would close the windows every time we used to cross the cities. He would not let us out into the markets, where the fights were happening.

In Calcutta, though, I saw the riots. We were in a special convoy, and the Hindus, armed with swords and guns, they were killing the Muslims wherever they would find them. And the Muslims too—they used to kill also. I saw those riots, but not too much. The Sikhs were not involved. *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*¹³ was the chief in Calcutta. He himself handed out swords and guns to the Muslims, inciting them to go on and kill Hindus. Not the Sikhs though, it was mostly Hindus.

¹¹ A city in Punjab, Pakistan.

¹² A mostly upper-class, posh area in Lahore, Pakistan.

¹³ Bengali politician and a lawyer who served as the fifth Prime Minister of Pakistan.

When we came to East Pakistan, there was peace there. There I enrolled in convent school, and then GC University,¹⁴ and then I got a scholarship for Germany for PhD in English Literature. I studied that and History. I got a lectureship, too.

But then I got married and came here – *bas aisay hi*.¹⁵

I have scars of swords on me. I still have those scars. I still have those scars, son.

Bilqees Akhtar – 80

Now that we have come to Pakistan, we have peace. We are not in the hands of the enemy; we are not oppressed. We are in our own *Watn*.¹⁶ Thank Allah, all praises are for Allah.

We underwent a lot of hardship—our parents. We have come from Hindustan, from *Sunam, Ludhianna, and Saroor*. We had homes in all three cities. I was very young; I'm telling you things my parents told me.

We had a good life before. We used to live with the Hindus there. We used to live with them as if it was our own brotherhood, our own family. If someone got married, there would be food. We used to take part in *Holi*.¹⁷ When *Eid*¹⁸ or *Holi* came around, we used to exchange gifts. We used to live as one. I don't know what happened, what enmity. They say they set a car on fire in Pakistan.

My clan says that my father was a very good man. Everyone would bow to him. We used to live as family. Very close. After the slaughter began, people came with swords. They attacked me first. Then they killed him. My mom got away, but I was in my dad's lap when he was

¹⁴ A historic university that still exists in Lahore, Pakistan: <http://www.gcu.edu.pk>

¹⁵ An Urdu phrase that literally translates “*just how it is*” – conveys an emotion similar to the English phrase “*you know how it is*,” with an air of disappointment.

¹⁶ Nation.

¹⁷ Hindu festival celebrated with colors.

¹⁸ An Islamic festival at the End of Ramadan that celebrates the Abrahamic sacrifice of the lamb.

killed—I survived. They used to show the parents as they murdered the children. The sword hit me. I have scars of swords on me. I still have those scars. I still have those scars, son.

Some died, some survived. They used to kill children and made a show of it. God saved my mother. We hid in the houses. They tossed a big pot into the house, so that maybe we would leave scared of the noise. We stayed hidden. When they left, then we got up.

Those who knew what was coming, they left days before. Those who didn't know or didn't have the will to leave—they thought it's nothing and that leaving home is really hard—they were killed. We were amongst those who thought nothing would happen. A lot of our people were killed. Our sister-in-law, she was so beautiful. Her five children and her husband were killed in front of her eyes. They swiped at her throat too, and almost cut it off. Just enough was saved to keep her from dying. God saved her. She walked a whole mile with her hands supporting her head. She kept her hands around her throat and went to a Sikh doctor who saved her. The doctor, they say, was a very good man. Maybe he did it in greed.

She left alone. She was alone her whole life after that. It's been five years since she died in Pakistan. My grandparents were killed too.

They also kept another one of my sisters-in-law for a full year. They kept the young beautiful girls. They married some, others ran away. She had even worked very hard to collect nine-hundred rupees¹⁹ for sparing her family. The Hindus had announced that if you give us money, we'll spare you. She did that but her family was still martyred. Our women came back after a year. They divorced some. The good women, they kept. My uncle's wife was one who came back, and by that time her husband was remarried. She married someone else. No one changed her religion.

We left on the 14th of August,²⁰ when the slaughter started. My mom left with her young son in her arms—he was a month old. My mother gave him to my aunt to hold. She got tired, he was crying so much. The group members said that he was going to get them killed. She put him down and just left him there. And after we covered a lot of distance my mother asked where he was. She said that he's been left. We have no news of him, we don't know if he's alive or dead.

¹⁹ In US Dollars this now equals around \$9.

²⁰ The Independence Date of Pakistan—the day it declared independence from British Rule and Partition from India.

We were so sad. Even till the day my mother died, she cried every 14th August over her son—what happened to him? Did the cats and dogs get him? Allah only knows.

How did your mother keep going after all this?

God gave her the will to go on. God saved us from so much pain. He helped us here too.

We reached the refugee camps. And they would announce when the cars would leave. They would go to Pakistan, Gujrat, Kasur. My mother brought six kids. Two of her own, and four of her brothers and sisters. We got aboard a train, and my mom said we would get off at Lahore. We were really scared of attacks on the trains. There were attacks on other trains, but not on ours. We thanked God when we reached Pakistan. We were advised to get off on different cities like Gujrat, but my mom said we're getting off at Pakistan. She had a lot of passion in her heart. She said we won't stop here. When we got to Pakistan, we just said—*we're here*.

When we reached, we starved for eight days. People helped, though. They cooked in large pots. When we finally got food, my uncle ate so much that he died later because of stomach pain. My mom carried him. She cried so much.

We faced difficulties settling. People used to celebrate that this was the day we left home. They got beautiful houses here. We didn't get anything; we didn't know how to. Our brother was young. My father, all my grandparents were dead. My mother made the decisions. She worked so hard. Many of the children to come were born to her hands.

But we were helped, we were given love. We stayed with a relative. They helped us so much. And they still help us. We got houses on rent. Thank God, we have a good home now.

My brother went once to India. He said he couldn't recognize the place. The same people aren't there anymore.

Around that time I was around nine-ten years of age—but I remember everything like I can see it right now.

Qamar-un-Nisa - 79

Day 1

My name is *Qamar-un-Nisa*. We used to live in Delhi when we were young, and later we moved to Bombay. *MashaAllah*,²¹ life was good there, and it was close to the city.

Dad was the chief engineer, so he had to look after a large area. We had servants, a huge house, and there was even a separate room for telephones! When we left Bombay, we moved to our grandparents who lived in *Qadian*.²²

Son, do you know what Qadian is?

So son, we came to Qadian because my father was transferred from Delhi to Karachi. And it was in these days that the agitation began. That's when the incidents were happening, the violence. Before my father left all of us in Qadian, he said: "Be prepared. I'll bring a truck. Put all of the belongings in it and come."

Dad brought a truck alright—and with seventy other trucks.

On the way, everyone was killed. Only three men survived. One was Mirza Nasir Ahmad, the other Akhtar, and one was my dad. Dad said we buried ourselves under the corpses to escape. On the skin around his head, next to his ears, there were marks where the bullets had grazed him.

Son, around that time I was around nine-ten years of age—but I remember everything like I can see it right now.

Son—that's enough for today—I'm tired, I'm very old now.

Day 2

Partition happened when I was in the second grade. My grandfather loved us immensely. I've seen my own father turn into a grandfather and I didn't see him love like that. When we were in Qadian, we were told that there'll be a curfew because the Sikhs were coming. My grandfather wrote down the addresses of our relatives in Lahore, and with a ten rupee²³ note tied it to our arms and told us, "If any of you get lost, go to these locations."

²¹ God willed it

²² A taboo topic in Sunni Muslim Pakistan – the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan has been constitutionally declared Kafir (non-Muslim). A strand of Islam that denies the Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet (i.e. believe in a Prophet after him, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad), they are considered heretical and therefore face constant threat of violence by average Pakistani Muslims and extremist groups. Socially and economically disenfranchised, they have sought refuge in a land called Qadian in India—this is also where the Ahmadiyya movement began.

²³ The Pakistani Rupee is Pakistan's national currency. 10 Rupees is equivalent to around 1 dollar.

When the alarm went off for the curfew, that meant that the Sikhs were here. They quickly got us out of our home and took us to a house nearby where other people were being collected too. My mother had our younger brother with her who was six days old at the time; my grandfather was going to take him out for a haircut when someone rushed in and told us that there was a danger to our lives. We rushed so much that they didn't even let me wear my shoes. He grabbed me and ordered me to run, and so I ran barefoot.

After a while the curfew ended, and my grandfather decided to go home and check for danger. He came home to two Sikhs waiting for him. All our belongings had been tossed out onto the alleyway. We had made long necklaces of the currency of the time; my grandfather said they had opened your chests, "I got really angry, and so I hit one of the Sikhs over the head with my stick. They attacked me and put three deep cuts into my arm. I was bleeding and I rushed to the door..." That's when my uncle entered, and asked, "What are you doing here?!" It was during this time the head of his spear was being stabbed into his back; my uncle hit them over the head with his stick and brought my grandfather home.

When he came back in this condition he said, "Count me amongst the martyrs now." My aunt bandaged him up, and after this we became more fearful. *What were we to do?*

The house was just full of stuff. Stuff from Delhi, Bombay—our aunt lived with us, so her stuff too. My father used to give a lot to the girls getting married in the family. There were just so many valuables there. They said afterwards that the amount taken from this house was the greatest.

We spent the night there, and in the morning they said that there was a hotel nearby that we must go to. We went there barefoot and we lived there for seven days. Our younger brothers would not eat from there. They had this boiled food there, *ghioun*;²⁴ no one liked it. The kids would become really upset.

Eight days later, we were told the buses are coming. They'd only let a few people onto the bus, but my grandfather made sure we all got on the same one. Thank God we got a place, and the things I saw on our journey I still remember vividly and whenever I think back to it, I get goose-bumps.

²⁴ A dish made simply of boiled wheat.

During our journey the soldiers stopped us a couple of times in the night, saying that there was danger ahead. They also ordered us not to drink the water there because it was poisoned. The soldiers spent the night making small *roti*²⁵ for us and fed all of us.

In the morning when we left, we crossed a river; it was dry of water, but full of belongings of people like rice, thread, and dead bodies. The eagles would nip at the arms, and raise it up and drop it again. So many sights like that; it was so painful to look at.

We reached Lahore, and when we saw our dad, we all started crying. He consoled all of us, and I told him, “Dad, I don’t even have shoes, I’m barefoot.” And one of the first things my father did was to get me shoes.

We lived in *Ichra*²⁶ for a while at a relative’s. Then we left for Karachi at an uncle’s. During this time my father was allotted his own house too. A few days later, it would be Eid. My grandmother asked the neighbors for sewing together the children’s clothes. We heard from their house, “No! They are *muhajirs*,²⁷ they will steal it!” And my grandmother and aunt cried so much, saying we left three sewing machines at home!

We were admitted into a government school there. We had only one set of a uniform and we’d wear it in the morning and wash it at night. My grandmother used to cry a lot. My grandfather used to remind her to be grateful to God just for the fact that the children are alive. But over time, it got better as we fell into a routine. My father was given a lot of respect and was appointed head engineer for a big company. Allah Almighty gave us a couple of cars too. Allah made it so much better, Allah gave us so much ease.

The *Ahmadiyya* community is still persecuted against in Pakistan. In India there was no problem, and even in Pakistan it was alright in the beginning. These *maulvis*²⁸ caused this problem with Bhutto and Zia in ’74. They’re still doing this, even though Islam is such a simple religion; they’ve complicated it so much that slowly all that is left is hate. You know how they say that *Quaid-e-Azam*’s²⁹ funeral prayer was not led by *Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan Sahb*,³⁰ that

²⁵ A South Asian way of making bread—round, thin and warmed over a fire—also known as a *chapatti*.

²⁶ A famous market in Lahore, Punjab.

²⁷ Immigrants—the word traditionally used for the Indians who emigrated to Pakistan.

²⁸ Islamic clerics.

²⁹ An honorific (title) given to the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which translates to “The Great Leader.”

³⁰ A famous Ahmadi member of Government at the time.

was because the person who ended up leading the prayer, *Shabir Ahmad Usmani*, he used to call us Ahmadis *kaffir*.³¹ He said how can I lead a prayer of a Muslim if I myself am a kaffir?

We had very good relations with the Sikhs and Hindus there. A while ago, my brother went to India; he said that the people there said, “How come no one came home from you guys!” It was so good; the Sikhs always supported us. The Hindus weren’t bad either—I think it was the Muslims who were reluctant to have relationships with them. We used to have food at each other’s houses. There was a Christian house opposite to ours, and they would send over food and so would we. It’s not the same anymore, but those who still go back to Qadian say that the Sikhs still honor us.

I’m not tired by the way; May Allah bless you.

³¹ Non-Muslim.

Everyone called us “Ghulam, Ghulam.”³² Then we said, we should not remain Ghulam, and then we got freedom.

Talat Aftab Qarshi – 81

I was ten years old at the time, and we lived in Amritsar. We were so young, we had no idea what was happening. We left two days before Partition. We saw so much before then.

The Hindus and Sikhs were not far away from where we lived; we did not have much of a relationship with them. They would come over sometimes, though, at my aunt's, at my cousin's. They used to bring sweets. They used to buy it from shops because Muslims would not eat food made from their houses. In school, we studied with the Hindus and Sikh girls. Our relationships with them were really good. We were friends. We didn't go to each other's houses, but we were in class together. We were on good terms.

We saw English people sometimes. They used to give us love, look at us with love. They used to show my baby sister a lot of love. They were good people. But the Indians, they got all the good jobs; government service, doctors; they had a hand in everything. Muslims used to get clerical jobs. Everyone called us “*Ghulam, Ghulam!*” Then we said, we should not remain Ghulam, and then we got freedom. My husband played a big role in making Pakistan. He was a student leader. He was of great service to Pakistan, and he took nothing for it. He was with *Quaid-e-Azam*. His mother used to say she would spend whole nights awake, sleepless. Her son would be gone for days and nights; they would imprison him. The English wanted to stay in power.

We went to Lahore to celebrate Eid with family. We thought that things might get better, that we'd stay there for a week, and then come back. We took nothing with us. Just some Eid clothes and stuff. We went to our aunt's and four days later, Pakistan came into being. We ended up staying at our aunt's for six months. Those who went after Pakistan was made, many of them left their own children there and ran away. It was so bad.

³² An Urdu word which means *servant*.

If we had not come two days before Partition, then only some of us would have made it. Half would have probably not made it back. I used to tell my mother you would have probably left us there if it wasn't for Eid—Eid saved our lives.

My dad stayed back in *Amritsar*.³³ He said that this would be part of Pakistan. He came back alive, but only after two months. My maternal uncle was killed on the way. All of my relatives left there, too. They left everything. All they had was the shoes in their hands.

We came by train. We were so scared. The train was stopped three times. The Hindus would kill everyone on the trains. We were amongst the young children. On our way to Lahore, they stopped us about three times; they used to do this with other trains and there would be a slaughter. They stopped our train because there was some threat, I think. I was too young. I didn't get up to check. My younger sister was only three, and she was in my lap. Whenever the train would get going again, people would say, "We are saved! We are saved!"

The Sikhs were cruel. I became afraid of them. They did bad, bad things. When Sikh gangs would come to nearby towns, they'd break into the houses and massacre the men and children. So, our community would gather all the women and children and place them in one house. They used to take everyone so that if the Sikhs came, no one would kill or kidnap us. And when they left, we would go home. We used to sit there whole nights, sitting, just looking at each other. There wasn't a lot of killing here in Pakistan. Muslims didn't kill too much. We didn't hear of any such stories.

Women were held back by them as prisoners. They abused women so much. The Sikhs married them when they grew older. Some women here went trying to retrieve them. Some even chose to remain behind. They would say, "Our children are here, what do you expect us to do?"

When we came to Pakistan, people couldn't help us. All of them were immigrants. They were all worried about themselves. Lahore's people did help a bit though, like my aunt who kept us for six months.

Here, life has been the same, too, I think. Because we got nothing here; we got no good home, no good furniture. Some people got plenty, though. But mum was very clever. She brought jewelry with her. You know how jewelry sold back then. We came here and we claimed land, too. There were no elders in our house and my older brother had been away for two years.

³³ An Indian city bordering Pakistan near Punjab.

But all my other brothers were young. One of them still made some attempt, and we got a poor old house in *Anarkali*.³⁴ When my older brother came he claimed a shop in Pindi. He came to Lahore for a while and when he went back, someone else had claimed the shop for themselves! People did a lot of looting here.

Your brother was missing for two years?

Before Pakistan was made, my brother and a few of his friends went to Kashmir. While he was there, this conflict broke out. After we came to Lahore and we didn't see him for two whole years! The Hindus had captured three-four men there. For two years they didn't let him go. Sometimes we'd get news that he had converted to Hinduism, sometimes something else. My mother used to cry, "Why has he become Hindu?"

Once, I was in Anarkali with my cousin. She didn't want to go alone, so she took me with her. While I was there, I looked up, and there he was, my brother. "*Sharif!*" I screamed. He saw me for the first time, and he said, "You're alive!" He must've thought, "They're all dead, that's not so bad!" [*Laughs*].

Then he took care of us, our worries.

The Muslims and Hindus used to compete a lot. When the Muslim school played hockey against the Hindu school, all the town's Muslims would get on one side, and all the Hindus on the other.

Munawwar Zaheer Muhammad – 86

I was fifteen years old in 1947. We lived in Lalpur, what is now called Faisalabad. The population at the time was only fifty-thousand. Now it's something like fifty, sixty-million.

In all the bazaar, only one shop was Muslim-owned; the rest were all owned by Hindu businessmen. We used to feel a bit exploited by the Hindus, financially. We were indebted to them, we were poor, we were farmers, we used to wear *dhotis*.³⁵

³⁴ A famous market in Lahore.

³⁵ A South Asian dress for men, much like a kilt, but of lesser quality materials and often worn by the less privileged.

It was a Muslim area, but Hindus were the powerful class; we were the backward kind.

We studied in a school called *Islamia*; the community collectively made this school. They taught us the Muslim way. They tried to lift us up, and we actually did make an effort to study. That school inspires me to this day. They've torn the school down now and replaced it with some commercial buildings, I think.

In the 8th grade, we had to go to Jhang to our grandfather. We joined school there, too. Most of the kids there were Hindu. They used to keep *achut*³⁶ from us. Our school was two and half miles away from home, and on our way there was a water stand where we would stop for water. We drank in one of their bowls, but there used to be a Hindu student there. His name was Prakash, I still remember his name. He said, "How is it that the Muslims are allowed to drink water from the same place as we drink water?" After that, they set aside a separate bowl for us Muslims.

The Muslim didn't touch a thing in the Hindus house, nor did he like it if the Hindu touched something in his house. At the railway station, one cooler said, "*Muslim Water*" and the other, "*Hindu Water*." This was the life we lived.

In Lalpur, one side of the town belonged to Muslims, and the other to Hindus, and in between there was a park. I gotta be honest with you, all of us played there together. There was this kid called *Yashpal*; I used to play scrabble with him. We played volleyball together, too. The Muslims and Hindus used to compete a lot. When the Muslim school played hockey against the Hindu school, all the town's Muslims would get on one side, and all the Hindus on the other.

In class we would argue with the Hindu kids over the creation of Pakistan. We supported the Muslim League,³⁷ and they were against it, and they even complained to the *master*³⁸ once. His name was *Bhagwaan Daas*. He was Hindu, and in class once he gave a one-hour lecture against the Muslim League just to convince me! But he was an exception. Otherwise, people wouldn't really talk about it.

³⁶ *Achut* is a Hindi word which means untouchable. In South Asia Religious groups often thought of the other as impure, and therefore would not share things such as utensils.

³⁷ The Muslim League was a political party founded by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan.

³⁸ In South Asia, the teacher is commonly referred to as the *master*.

During the elections, the villager Muslims, the property owners, they traveled on donkey carts just to go vote for Jinnah.³⁹ When the Muslim League won the majority in Punjab, Bengal, and Sindh, there was a feeling that Pakistan was about to come into being. That's when the violence started. All the Hindus left this part of Pakistan, and all the Muslims left Punjab in India. It was a huge migration, about ten million people. Hindus started moving away from our town; the houses became empty.

In Bihar, there was a lot of violence against Muslims, and a lot of violence against Hindus in Eastern Bengal. My aunt was martyred on the way, some of my cousins, and uncles too; there was a massacre carried out by the Sikhs in Dera Baba Nanak.⁴⁰ Some Hindus were killed here, I have to admit. People just lost their minds.

The Muslim immigrants told me stories. My uncle's village was attacked by Sikhs on the day of Eid. People started running. My uncle stayed there and said, "Wait, let me finish my *seviyan*!"⁴¹ The Sikhs reached him and killed him. One of my aunts, her name was *Amt-ul-Hafeez*, she was kidnapped by the Sikhs. She still hasn't come. She's probably dead now.

You know, the Muslims were cruel, too. This happened here in Pakistan, too—whole trains were massacred, their women were taken. Just, people went mad.

[pauses]

I don't know if I should tell you this, but when Partition happened, sticks were distributed amongst Muslims in my town, and when three poor Hindus passed by, they were killed. The Muslim Welfare Organization distributed the sticks for protection, actually.

But it was worse for the Muslims in India. Seven thousand Muslim women were left there, and I don't know what the number is for Hindu women in Pakistan. They tried to look for these lost women, and sometimes they'd even find them. I remember we had a cousin who was left behind. They found her, and she said the Sikhs treated her very well and sent her home to Pakistan with respect. She was married to an uncle of mine. But this was an exception.

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³⁹ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, earlier referred to as Quaid-e-Azam, head of the Muslim League.

⁴⁰ Dera Baba Nanak (DBN) is a small town about 30 miles north of Amritsar.

⁴¹ A traditional South Asian desert made of milk and noodles often had on the day of Eid.

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